



## **Language as a Tool for Human Integration: A Father's Journey to Bridge Cultures**

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### **Abstract**

Language barriers have been identified as a key factor contributing to social fragmentation and inter-ethnic tensions. The problem of 'forging ahead', a situation in which languages compete among themselves and scramble for recognition, always rears its head. A unified language could potentially streamline communication, enhance mutual understanding, and promote a shared regional or national identity among diverse ethnic groups. However, the success of such a language hinges on addressing cultural sensitivities and ensuring broad-based support from all communities involved. This study seeks to explore the implications of the Hausa language among different linguistic entities of Northern Nigeria by examining its potential impacts on social cohesion and language endangerment. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with linguistic unification in a multiethnic context. It utilised a quantitative approach with the use of SPSS data analysis and Lev Vygotsky's (1896-1934) socio-cultural theory as a theoretical framework. The findings reveal a myriad of detrimental effects resulting from the marginalisation of indigenous languages and the erosion of cultural identity. Although Hausa on the other hand, has helped minimise inter-ethnic rivalry and conflict that would erupt if any of the indigenous languages were imposed to play these roles in the region.

Key words: Language, Human, Integration, Culture

### **Introduction**



In multilingual societies like Nigeria, a language that can be used as an effective instrument for societal development and the promotion of national consciousness and unity can also be used as a weapon for marginalisation and or exclusion. The latter trend can destabilise a people, a region or a nation as it sets different linguistic groups against each other in an attempt to fashion out an identity for themselves and express their existence and or relevance to the society.

Hausa language is the most widely spoken language in West Africa (Baldi, 1977; Sarbi, 2005). It has a very large number of speakers, indeed more than fifty million (50 million) (Adamu, 1978; Garba, 2010). The Hausa cities are located in Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger (Yakasai, 2001; Amfani, 2004). However, certain factors led to the rapid growth and increase in the population of Hausa speakers. One of such is the traditional and religious practice of marrying up to, but not more than, four wives (Garba, 2010). Other factors include its simplicity in communication, richness in vocabulary, and its ability to assimilate other minor languages it comes into contact with (Ibrahim, 1978; Jinju, 1990; Yakasai, 2001).

This study highlights how the Hausa language, among other functions, unites the people of Northern Nigeria. Its unifying role and its allied issues with a view to showing that the imposition or adoption of any language apart from Hausa as the regional official language will lead to a situation as captured by Cob (cited in Igboanusi 2002): “if you insist, the union will be dissolved. It would mean that you have kindled a fire which all the waters of the ocean cannot put out, but which seas of blood can only extinguish”.

## **2. Literature Review**

The review was carried out to assess current literature in the field of study with a view to taking cognisance of the findings and contributions made by fellow researchers. The aspects reviewed include, among others, Hausa Language in a formal Nigerian setting, Social cohesion and Conflict resolution through Hausa, and The Influence of Hausa on other linguistic groups.

### **2.1 Hausa Language in a Formal Nigerian Setting**



There are about 400 languages spoken in Nigeria. Nigeria has the highest ethnic group, language, and population density of any country on the African continent. Three of the groups into which the languages of Africa are classified appear in Nigeria: they are Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger Congo. The Hausa language, which is perhaps the most important language of West Africa, has more speakers than any other Nigerian language. Historically, the Hausa speech community was reinforced during colonial times when the British adopted Hausa as the language of administration for the entire Northern Region of Nigeria, thereby contributing to the volume and density of Hausa speakers in Nigeria, (Fallou Ngom, 2022).

## **2.2 Social, Cultural and Economic Benefits Associated with the Use of Hausa**

The spread of Hausa in the region was facilitated by a number of factors. As the language of the Hausa/Fulani social and cultural elite, it always enjoyed a position of prestige vis-a-vis the other local languages, except perhaps among the Kanuri-speaking people whose long standing resistance to the Hausa/Fulani authority has no exception on the language issue. As a subsidiary language of Islam in the region, the Koran, as well as most of the Koranic law, had been translated into it, which gave it a special socio-cultural relevance in the context of the common Muslim heritage shared by most of the various ethnic groups in the region (Osaji 1977). As a regional official language, in addition to being the language of local administration, it also became the medium of instruction in the primary schools as well as an important prerequisite for employment opportunities in both public and private sectors. The overall result of these social, cultural and economic benefits associated with the use of the language was the development of widespread bilingualism in Hausa and the local languages, especially in the minority language communities where Hausa became the undisputed lingua franca.

## **2.3 The Power of Major Languages over the Minority Languages**



In Nigeria, as in many African countries, the major languages have posed a threat to the minority languages since speakers of the major languages are “the power brokers and decision makers” (Adegbija 2001: 286). Some researchers have made useful insights into the nature of the threat of Nigeria’s minority languages. For instance, Ugwuoke (1999) identifies 117 northern minority languages with less than 5,000 speakers, which are in danger of disappearing as a result of the roles of Hausa. Similarly, the researcher identifies 32 southern languages with less than 5,000 speakers, which are very likely to disappear following the overbearing influence of English (and Pidgin).

Dawulung (1999) raises even greater alarm than Ugwuoke on the threat of minority languages. According to him, “in Plateau state, all native languages can be said to be either endangered or disadvantaged.” He blames this on the attitude of the native speakers, particularly the youth, who prefer to speak to one another in Hausa. The situation is so serious that those who attempt “to speak their native language either speak it with Hausa accent or a concoction of English, Hausa and the native language”.

## **2.4 Minority Languages Under the Threat of Endangerment**

Studies on endangerment (e.g. Haruna 2003; Kuju 1999: 41) have shown, in respect of Bauchi, Gombe, and some other northern states, several Hausa-speaking groups still maintain their identities but without convincing knowledge of their origin, that is, whether they were originally Hausa or from some other linguistic stock. What is certain is the fact that they now speak Hausa, which is fast taking over their original languages. The threat of Hausa to the survival of minority languages in the north is more severe than that of English. The threat of English is mostly among the educated persons while that of Hausa includes both the educated and the uneducated persons. In some states, particularly Bauchi, Sokoto, and Kebbi states, Hausa is the first and the only language of most children of those areas who have grown to hear Hausa spoken at home, in the market, and at school.





While Arabic and Hausa are the languages for Islamic worship, Hausa and English are the main languages of Christian worship and sermon. The commonly noticed practice is that non-Hausa pastors and clerics especially in Kaduna, Plateau, Nassarawa, Taraba, Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, Kebbi, and Bornu states often use Hausa in preaching to the members of their own ethnic group, occasionally with someone translating into the minority languages (Kuju 1999: 50).

The review above seems to suggest that much work on language has appeared in literature in respect of Hausa in Northern Nigeria. However, the specific case and the seriousness of threats posed by Hausa seems less well understood. Also, those who have investigated, particularly the replacement of minority tribes by Hausa, do not point to specific domains of influence which depict real threat. A survey on language use was administered to minority-language speakers. Findings show that the minority languages have continued to lose their functional values because of the increasing preference for Hausa. This preference is leading to the speedy neglect of minority languages in the “intimate” domains of life, contrary to the expectation that low domains are more likely for the mother tongue (MT) while the high domains are more likely for the major language (Fishman 1968; Greenfield 1972; Parasher 1980; Fasold 1984).

### **3. Research Method**

The study was carried out in Borno state, representing the North East, Plateau state for the North central, and Kaduna state for the North west zone. One hundred and twenty respondents were randomly sampled, with forty from each of the areas. Three undergraduates served as research assistants in the administration of the questionnaire in the different regions. The responses to the questions were analysed with the use of simple percentages. Primary data was utilised, reflecting various demographic characteristics of the respondents. Twenty questions were constructed to solicit for the views of respondents on their preference in the use of (Hausa), a language other than the respondents’ native language. Alaku (2008), used the instrument and was found to be reliable and valid for adoption in this study.

#### **Tables and Figures**

The Table below presents an overview of the broad patterns of the major vs. minor language configuration in the various states.



Table 1: List of Northern Nigeria's Heterogeneous Languages

S/No	State	Major Languages	Minor Languages	Lingua Franca
1	Adamawa	Fulfulde, Hausa	Fulfulde Hausa, Kanuri and Tiv	Fulfulde, Hausa.
2	Bauchi	Hausa, Fulfulde	MANY and English	Hausa and Fulfulde
3	Benue	Tiv, Idoma	Hausa, English and Igala	Tiv, Idoma and English
4	Borno	Kanuri, Hausa	MANY and Hausa	Kanuri and Hausa
5	Gombe	Fulfulde, Hausa	MANY and Hausa	Fulfulde and Hausa
6	Jigawa	Hausa, Fulfulde	English	Hausa and Fulfulde
7	Kaduna	Hausa, Fulfulde	MANY, English and Pidgin	Hausa and English
8	Kano	Hausa, Fulfulde	English and Pidgin	Hausa
9	Katsina	Hausa, Fulfulde	English and	Hausa

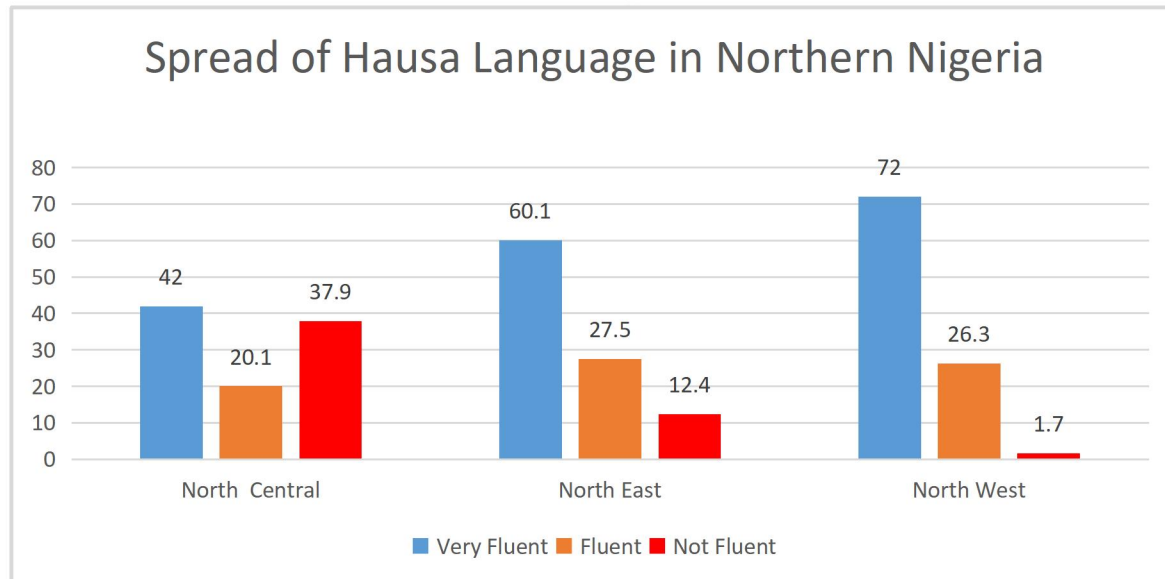


			Pidgin	
10	Kebbi	Hausa, Fulfulde	MANY, English and Pidgin	Hausa
11	Kogi	Yoruba, Hausa, Ibira , English	MANY, Igala,and Nupe	English
12	Kwara	Yoruba, Nupe, Gwagi	MANY, Ibira Hausa	Yoruba and Hausa
13	Nasarawa	Hausa, Gwandara, Gbagi	MANY, English and Pindgin	Hausa and English
14	Niger	Hausa, Nupe	MANY, Gbagi, Gwadara	Hausa,Nupe and English
15	Plateau	Hausa, Angas. Ebira.	MANY, Hausa, Gwandara and Birom	Hausa
16	Sokoto	MANY		Hausa
17	Taraba	Yakube,Fulfulde,Mumuye, Jukun, Tiv, Hausa, Kuteb, Ichen, Mambile	Kam, Ndoola, Wurkum	Yakube
18	Yobe	Hausa, Kanuri, Bade, Fulfulde	Ngizim, Bole, Duwai, Karekare, Ngamo, Babur	Hausa
19	Zamfara	Hausa and Fulfulde	Hausa and	Hausa



			Fulfulde	
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**Figure 2: Diagram on the spread of Hausa (Sample)**



#### 4. Data Analysis

The responses for each of the questions were analysed with the use of percentage.

##### i. Respondents from the North Central Geographical Area

Respondents' level of Fluency in Speaking Hausa Language. Fluency Frequency: Very fluent 42%, Fluent 20.1%, Not fluent 37.9%, Total 100%. The frequency of the responses indicates that 42% of respondents were very fluent, 20.1% were fluent, 37.9% were not fluent in Hausa language.

##### ii. Respondents from North-Eastern Geographical Area





Respondents level of Fluency in Speaking Hausa Language. Fluency Frequency: Very fluent 60.1%, Fluent 27.5%, Not fluent 12.4%, Total 100%. The frequency of the responses indicates that 60.1% of respondents were very fluent, 27.5% were fluent, 12.4% were not fluent in Hausa languages. Thus, a significant number of respondents in this region understand Hausa compared to respondents from the North Central geographical area.

iii. Respondents from North West Geographical Area

iv.

Respondents level of Fluency in Speaking Hausa Language. Fluency Frequency: Very fluent, 72% Fluent 26.2%, Not fluent 1.7% Total 100% The frequency of the responses indicates that 72% of respondents were very fluent, 26.2% were fluent, 1.7% were not fluent in Hausa language. This region has the highest number of respondents who understand Hausa more than any of the other regions.

## **5. Data Findings and Discussions**

The study discovered a number of factors that contribute to the supremacy and influence of Hausa over and above most languages in some of the states of the north. On the degree of fluency in Hausa language across all the three geo-political areas which comprise of nineteen states, a total of (58%) of the respondents speak Hausa very fluently, (25%) speak Hausa fluently while (17%) of the respondents even though might have understood Hausa, they declared that they were not fluent in the language. Some respondents claim to be very fluent in Hausa and the reason being that their fathers and mothers were merely speaking Hausa with them at home right from their childhood. Thus, communication in the homes with children through the use of Hausa language enable competence in the language. This agrees with the claim made by (Ibrahim, 1978; Jinju 1990; Yakasai, 2001) that one of factors which made Hausa language become prominent include its simplicity in communication, richness in vocabulary, and its ability of assimilating other minor languages it comes into contact with.

However, some respondents claimed that they were from inter-ethnic marriage homes where their mothers were not speaking their native language at home with them and their fathers rarely



spend much time at home due to the nature of their daily work to support the family. Consequently, more of English and Hausa are spoken and used at home more than even their native languages. This situation creates little or no access for the children to their native languages for regular use in their daily communication in their various homes.

Other respondents observed that as for the language mostly spoken and used at home, most parents use Hausa. Their major reason was that children find it easier to communicate and express themselves in Hausa more than in their native language or English. This is because, the children spend more time with their friends outside the home communicating in the common language (Hausa) of the immediate environment.

In view of the above and in this era of globalization, Northern Nigeria needs a regional language, a global language to ensure that it is part of the global village. Hausa, therefore, should be seen as given the pluralistic nature of the Northern Nigeria linguistic environment. It is simply an indispensable linguistic resource. Without Hausa language for the not-so educated, communication among the different ethnic groups would be impossible. Hausa, therefore, forms a linguistic bridge across the multi-ethnic population as well as a link with the international community. It helps the region to do business complementing the roles of the indigenous languages in inter-ethnic and inter-national communication. Apart from Hausa language no indigenous language has been enveloped to perform these functions; therefore, there would be no basis for conflict between the roles of Hausa and those of the indigenous languages in formal domains in the region's linguistic context. Bagwasi (2003:217) rightly suggests "striking a balance between the minority languages and using them to complement each other."

## **6. Contributions of the Study**

This research has helped to deepen readers' understanding on the linguistic landscape in Northern Nigeria by highlighting the role of Hausa language as a tool for human and cultural unification, irrespective of the marginalisation of indigenous languages and its implications for linguistic diversity. It sheds light on how Hausa, the common language of the environment was found to be the widely spoken in the homes and the overall result of these social, cultural and economic benefits associated with the language use was the development of widespread bilingualism in



Hausa and the local languages especially in the minority communities where Hausa became the undisputed lingua franca (Agbeyisi, 1984). By discussing the consequences of language marginalization on cultural heritage, the study underscores the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous languages as essential components of Nigeria's cultural identity.

#### 7. The implications of the study.

To analyse and interpret responses to the questionnaire, data were collected from a sample of 120 respondents. The results are summarised and interpreted to understand the implications of the influence of Hausa language in Northern Nigeria over the minority languages and the consequences include among others:

##### Lack of effective communication

When one abandons their native language for another, one is bound to make errors in the language, which could hinder effective communication. It is difficult for a native speaker to achieve proficiency in a foreign language except if one studies the language for a long period, and even at that, native competence may still not be assured in terms of accuracy and pronunciation.

##### A Loss of Identity

Many Northern Nigerians can only speak Hausa, which is not a good idea because Hausa is to them a second language, and for one to be a second language learner, that means the person must have acquired the first language. This becomes a problem for a native speaker because it will question his identity. Linguicide amounts to the eroding of one's identity and culture because once one cannot speak his language, one would lose a part of himself.

##### Loss of Birth Right

Every language is unique since the language embodies unique and distinctive cultures and traditions which is a symbol of their exclusive contributions to the knowledge in the world. Every speech community is entitled to its indigenous language. It is a form of inheritance that was passed down to them by their parents. If they are not able to pass it down to their future generation, then that means they have lost their birth right.



## Language endangerment

Adeyanju T.K. (2017), claim that a language is considered to be endangered when the speakers of a language are not speaking with their children in the same language. He further observed that language endangerment is a process when a particular language is at risk or situation of falling out of use as a result of its speakers shifting to speaking another language.

## Lack of standard value

Eyisi (2003) notes that “accuracy in speech and writing makes effective understanding a reality. But wrong spelling, defective punctuation, poor pronunciation, and erroneous sentences or misuse of words can hinder communication”.

## No Unique Way of Seeing the Universe

The importance of language is beyond communication. There are some unique features which include proverbs, rituals, idioms, religion, dance and ceremonies which every particular language makes irreplaceable. According to Usman (2014), “Language represents its speakers' way of viewing and interpreting the universe, be that universe physical, spiritual or social.” An indigenous language that is fostered by language diversity encourages innovative thinking and also highlights different ways of seeing the universe.

## 8. Conclusion

The study identifies the intricate interplay between language policies, societal attitudes, and historical legacies in perpetuating language marginalisation. The implications of which underscore the urgent need for comprehensive language revitalisation efforts and policy reforms to promote linguistic diversity, preserve cultural heritage, and foster inclusive development in Nigeria.

It is contended that with controversies surrounding the adoption of any of the minority languages and the grave implications such adoption endangers; Hausa Language saves the day as the region's lingua franca. It integrates all the people as a cohesive entity, acceptable to all (to



some grudgingly), and it serves the purpose of togetherness regardless of the feelings from some quarters of linguistic domination.

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